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Strength and power – conditions and doctrinal assumptions of the security policy of the Russian Federation

The end of the Cold War and disintegration of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of a new type of system of international and global security. The end of the Cold War rivalry and risk of global conflict built a sense of stability and changed perceptions of threats. However, recently, unprecedented incidents connected with the annexation of Crimea and armed conflicts in Eastern Ukraine have led to a change in the whole geopolitical situation, not only in Eastern Europe, but also across the globe.

These incidents signal an important change in the current state of international relations as well as a turning point in the perception of threats to international security. The situation has also led to an altered understanding of security by the Russian Federation and the threats it faces - mostly posed by the Western world. Thus, this paper aims to present the process of evolution of the Russian Federation's perception of threats to its own security, along with an analysis of the newest doctrinal assumptions in the security policy adopted by the Russian government in reaction to an open confrontation with the Western world.

Evolution of the assumptions and concepts of security of the Russian Federation

The security policy of the Russian Federation has largely been determined by the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The first period of policy formation in the 1990s might be described by the phrase, "syndrome of ambitious weakness". Russia at that time attempted to maintain its position as a global power of crucial importance for the new world order. Formally, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and the owner of a huge nuclear arsenal, it was entitled to assume such an attitude. However, Russia's real geopolitical position at that time was much weaker than before due to international considerations and internal problems, including political and economic chaos.

A major change in Russia's international position and security policy was brought about when President Vladimir Putin assumed power in 2000. In addition, the world market's demand for natural resources exported by the Russian Federation improved the economic condition of the country. Therefore, the government could spend much more money on the army after its functional downfall in the 1990s.

The following years witnessed the growing importance of the Russian Federation in the international arena, this was accompanied by increasingly complicated relations with Western nations, in particular the United States. A speech delivered by Vladimir Putin at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security was a clear indication of the change in Russia's attitude and understanding of its role in the world. Putin attacked the USA and blamed them for creating a unipolar world. He also accused Western countries of expanding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which in his opinion was a breach of earlier agreements. Moreover, he declared that the planned installation of elements of an anti-missile shield in Central and Eastern Europe was an act aimed against Russia, to which he needed to react accordingly¹.

¹ "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy", at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>, 21 September 2015; "Putin atakuje Stany Zjednoczone", at <http://www.wprost.pl/ar/101176/Putin-atakuje-Stany-Zjednoczone>, 21 September 2015.

Anti-Western Rhetoric

Anti-Western rhetoric has often been a common element in the narrative of the Russian Federation; this is also reflected in the history of official doctrinal documents referring to foreign policy and security. Depending on the needs determined by the domestic and international situation of the moment, Western nations were presented instrumentally, and with varied intensity, as foes intending to weaken the international position of the Russian Federation. The official narrative indicated that such attitude on the part of the West was motivated by a desire to counteract the growing importance and role of the Russian Federation worldwide.

The deciding moment in Russia's intensified view of the West and the United States as the 'principal threat' to its security was the "revolution of dignity" in Ukraine and the subsequent Russian annexation of Crimea, which resulted in conflict in the Ukraine's Eastern provinces. These developments led to a radical deterioration in relations between Russia and Western nations, the causes and consequences of which were entirely different than those concerning the earlier events of 2014 in Ukraine.

The Western countries, like the new Ukrainian government, assumed that the "revolution of dignity" was a spontaneous reaction of society to the authoritarian rule of President Yanukovich. His deposition from function, on the other hand, was an effect of lack of realization of the settlement negotiated with the opposition on February 21, 2015 with the participation of foreign ministers from Germany (Frank Walter-Steinmeier) and Poland (Radosław Sikorski), and a representative from France (Eric Fournier)². The West accused Russia of annexing Crimea, which was a violation of the principles and standards of international law and a breach of the terms of many bilateral and multilateral agreements signed by Russia.

So-called 'differences in interpretation' also accompanied subsequent geo-political developments, including the outbreak of conflict in Eastern Ukraine. According to Western countries, the conflict was provoked by Russia, which later threw gas on the proverbial fire by sending in arms and regular troops to the two Ukrainian districts shaken by separatist movements.

Such an interpretation was entirely rejected by the Russian Federation, according to whom Ukraine suffered a coup plotted by covert services of the Western states, which led to the overthrowing of a legally elected incumbent President. Furthermore, the annexation of Crimea was described as a necessary act aimed at protecting local citizens against Kiev- fascists and Bandera followers.

² O. Varfolomeyev, "Ukraine's Ruling Party Faces Defections", *Eurasia Daily Monitor* vol. 11, no. 34, at [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=41999&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=756&no_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=41999&tx_ttnews[backPid]=756&no_cache=1), 21 September 2015.

Russia was also highlighting the fact that the separation of Crimea from Ukraine was fully legal, thus international law had not been violated. The government of Russia describes the incorporation of the peninsula into the motherland as an act of “restorative justice” and the correction of a historic mistake: ie the handing of the area over to Ukraine under the USSR. Russia also rejects accusations that they provoked the conflict in eastern Ukraine and that they continue to support local separatists. It interprets the occurrences in the Donetsk and Lugansk districts as a spontaneous protest by citizens against the illegal seizure of power by the country’s opposition.

Social Consolidation

It is also worthy of note that the Russian authorities have been able to skilfully heat up the patriotic and emotional atmosphere around Crimea. On the 18th of March 2015, during a speech opening the concert celebrating the first anniversary of annexation, Putin stated that the “incorporation” of Crimea did not stem from a desire to expand the territory of Russia, but was conditioned by the need for justice as well as historical reasons. He added that millions of Russians were endangered and expected the Russian state to provide help and support³.

Thanks to this type of rhetoric Russia experienced social consolidation and the government gained increasing support for their actions. The Russian public still backs the annexation and view it as a justified step and a necessary measure in helping its citizens to “return” to the motherland in the face of a threat from Kiev’s nationalists and Bandera followers. A poll carried out in March 2014 by the Russian Levada Centre found that 86% of the population share this view, whereas 8% claim that incorporation of Crimea was an annexation⁴. The research indicated increasing support for Putin’s policy, amounting to over 80 percent of the population.⁵

Favourable public opinion has not been affected by constantly changing accounts of the events in Crimea in 2014 as offered by Vladimir Putin. At first the President denied that Russian troops were engaged in any way in the annexation of the peninsula. He claimed that the so-called little green men were local self-defence fighters who simply purchased their military supplies in a shop. Several months later he stat-

³ “Concert celebrating Crimea and Sevastopol’s reunification with Russia”, 18 March 2015, at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47878>, 21 September 2015.

⁴ Происходящее в Украине, Крыму и реакция России, at <http://www.levada.ru/26-03-2014/proiskhodyashchee-v-ukraine-krymu-i-reaktsiya-rossii>, 21 September 2015.

⁵ “Владимир Путин: отношение и доверие”, at <http://www.levada.ru/16-04-2014/vladimir-putin-otnoshenie-i-doverie>, 21 September 2015.

ed that the Russian military had participated in the organization of the referendum. Just before the anniversary of the annexation, in a documentary “Crimea. The Way Home,” Putin admitted that the whole process had been planned and carried out by Russian soldiers and special forces, all of whom were acting on his orders⁶.

War Doctrine

A clear confirmation of the anti-Western rhetoric of the Russian Federation is also seen in doctrinal changes in perceptions of the security of the country. Although works on a new draft of the War Doctrine of the Russian Federation had been underway since 2013, it was the Ukrainian conflict that to a great extent influenced the final shape of the document (despite the fact that it does not contain any direct reference to the conflict)⁷. The new war doctrine adopted by President Putin on the 26th of December 2014 indicates the West and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as the main threats to the security of the Russian state⁸. In the opinion of the Russian strategists who prepared the document, the actions of the Western countries result from their will to weaken Russia, to counteract its growing importance in the world, and to undermine its independence in the international arena, including its foreign policy and security⁹.

The updated war doctrine consists of four parts, which present the main threats to the security of the Russian state as well as its military policy, actions, and undertakings aimed at strengthening defensive potential and the state itself¹⁰.

⁶ “Putin odpowiada na pytania Rosjan: Nasze wojsko było na Krymie. W Naddniestrzu powinni o sobie zdecydować”, 17 April 2014, at <http://www.gazetaprawna.pl/artykuly/791577,putin-odpowiada-na-pytania-rosjan-nasze-wojsko-bylo-na-krymie-w-naddniestrzu-powinni-o-sobie-zdecydowac.html>, 21 September 2015; “Krymu „droga do ojczyzny”? Putin opowiada, jak wydał rozkaz aneksji półwyspu”, 9 March 2015, at <http://swiat.newsweek.pl/putin-w-filmie-dokumentalnym-przyznaje-ze-nakazal-aneksje-krymu,artykuly,358637,1.html>, 21 September 2015.

⁷ S. Blank, “Russia’s Military Doctrine Reflects Putin’s Paranoia and Siege Mentality”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor* vol. 12, no. 2, 6 January 2015, at [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=43237&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=786&no_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=43237&tx_ttnews[backPid]=786&no_cache=1), 21 September 2015.

⁸ “Президент утвердил новую редакцию Военной доктрины”, 26 December 2014, at <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47334>, 21 September 2015.

⁹ R. McDermott, “Putin Signs New Military Doctrine: Core Elements Unchanged”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor* vol. 12, no. 2, 6 January 2015, at [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=43236&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=786&no_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=43236&tx_ttnews[backPid]=786&no_cache=1), 21 September 2015.

¹⁰ “Военная доктрина Российской Федерации”, 30 December 2014, at <http://www.rg.ru/2014/12/30/doktrina-dok.html>, 21 September 2014.

The document underlines that the doctrine is strictly defensive; however, Russia reserves the right to use its army in the face of aggression that threatens the state or its allies. The doctrine also indicates that the Russian army may be used abroad for international missions realized in conformity with the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council or other international bodies responsible for security. Russia reserves the right to use the army to, „provide security to its citizens residing out of the borders of the Russian Federation”¹¹. This last provision caused considerable concern in the Baltic States and other countries with a sizeable Russian minority.

Any analysis of the doctrinal principles of Russia's security policy should also include issues surrounding the use of nuclear weapons. The doctrine provides that Russia reserves the right to decide about using nuclear weapons in two cases:

- as a response to a nuclear attack on itself or one of its allies,
- to respond to a conventional attack on a scale which would threaten the foundations of existence of the Russian Federation¹².

As has been pointed out, the new version of the war doctrine possesses a clear anti-West character. The main threat to Russian security comes from Western countries and their armed forces, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. One of the most significant dangers, according to Russia, is the strengthening of the military position of NATO and its establishment of goals with a global range, which Russia treats as a breach of the norms of international law. Other threats posed by NATO include its expansion plans and the building up of NATO's military infrastructure in the countries bordering Russia¹³.

The doctrine also recognizes military manoeuvres and the distribution of troops in areas neighbouring Russia as a means of exerting political and military pressure. Russia pointed out that plans to place elements of an anti-missile shield in Central and Central-Eastern Europe severely undermine global stability and upset the established balance of power in the nuclear sphere¹⁴.

The principal internal threat was defined as interference by foreign special forces from opponent countries aimed at overthrowing the legal Russian government, leading to social and political destabilization and a constitutional coup. Among other hostile activities, the doctrine mentions “foreign propaganda” designed to compromise the fundamental spiritual and historical values, as well as the patriotic attitude, of Russian citizens¹⁵.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.; “Что доктрина прописала”, 29 December 2014, at <http://www.rg.ru/2014/12/29/doktrina.html>, 21 September 2015.

¹⁴ *Военная доктрина...*

¹⁵ S. Blank, *op. cit.*

The doctrine also indicates many other threats to Russia's security, including global terrorism and extremism. The creators of the doctrine noted that international attempts to eliminate these threats are insufficient, thus eliminating this threat is of key importance to the world's security. The document considers a terrorist assault with biological or chemical weapons or radioactive materials to be highly probable, thus this type of threat must be addressed effectively¹⁶.

The Confrontational West

According to provisions laid out in the document, the details of the war doctrine are specified in presidential proclamations made to the Russian Federal Assembly. Official statements of Russian authorities referring to problems of security are also significant. These are often presented during sessions of state institutions responsible for maintaining order. In this context one should note President Putin's meeting with the members of security forces held on the 26th of March 2015.

During the meeting the Russian President declared that the state's security and functioning of the defence and law enforcement institutions are particularly important. He stated that 2014 was 'not the easiest time' due to escalating tensions in the international arena, especially in the Middle East and other unstable regions, including Ukraine. He stated that as a result of a coup Ukraine has been plunged into a civil war, however Russia was doing its best to settle the conflict and restore normality. Moreover, he added that the Russian state was striving to prevent humanitarian catastrophe and had thus admitted hundreds of thousands of refugees from Donbas into its territory.¹⁷

Putin added that independent Russian policy and "help" offered to Ukraine seem to cause considerable irritation for some countries, which employ a whole range of activities to deter Russia from pursuing its policy. Such measures include: attempts to politically isolate the Russian State, exertion of economic pressures, the waging of information warfare, and the use of special forces¹⁸.

President Putin stressed that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization continues to develop rapid reaction forces and strengthen its infrastructure in the vicinity of Russian borders. Forcing the installation of components of anti-missile protection in

¹⁶ *Военная доктрина...*

¹⁷ "Federal Security Service board meeting", 26 March 2015, at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/49006>, 21 September 2015.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Europe and regions of Asia and the Pacific is a violation of established nuclear parity. Putin accused the US of repudiating the anti-missile protection treaty; in his opinion the decision ruined the foundations of the contemporary system of security¹⁹.

During the same meeting Putin boasted the effectiveness of Russian special forces: the data he quoted indicated that, thanks to their actions, the number of terrorist assaults in 2014 dropped by half (compared to 2013). According to the information he presented, the special forces prevented around 74 million cyber assaults aimed at Russian IT systems and detained over 300 collaborators and agents of foreign intelligence. The Russian President stated that the foreign special services intend to continue their activities during the coming election campaigns in an effort to create chaos in the country. According to him, there are plans to create internal destabilization, which would be achieved by financing Russian associations and non-governmental organizations²⁰.

The Russian President explicitly stated that, in spite of the threats, Russia would not allow itself to be intimidated. He stressed that the Russian state had never been intimidated, and the authorities will react to any internal and external threats to national security. He concluded that the international public would not respect Russia if it made concessions, but rather only if it would become stronger and stronger²¹.

Priority: Modernization

Taking the above into account, the authorities insisted that Russia react properly to the “challenges” coming from the West. In order to achieve this, and in spite of the financial crisis, they announced full realization of ambitious plans to modernize the Russian army. According to a decree issued by Putin on the 7th of May 2012, 70% of the army should be equipped with the state-of-the-art weapons.²² Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin stated many times that the sanctions imposed by the West would not impede the implementation of this programme, which according to his knowledge had been so far carried out on schedule.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.; P. Bajor, “Od Kosowa po Donbas”, *Nowa Europa Wschodnia*, 2 April 2015, at <http://new.org.pl/2153,post.html>, 21 September 2015.

²¹ *Federal Security Service*...

²² “Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 7 мая 2012 г. N 603 „О реализации планов (программ) строительства и развития Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации, других войск, воинских формирований и органов и модернизации оборонно-промышленного комплекса””, 9 May 2012, at <http://www.rg.ru/2012/05/09/vpk-dok.html>, 21 September 2015.

These are important political declarations, which (regardless of possible setbacks in the implementation of individual upgrades) demonstrate the importance modernizing the army holds for the Russian authorities. Putin continues to repeat his sentiment that the only assurance of security for the Russian state is its military strength, which is held in esteem by Western countries and NATO: thus, he declares, it is necessary to further finance the programme to professionalize the army.

Arctic Interests

A more and more important element in Russian policy is their plans for the Arctic. Its role for international relations and global security continues to grow, mostly due to potential natural resources and new transportation routes. Russian interest in the region was presented in a document dated 18th September 2008, „Basic Guidelines for Russia’s State Policy in the Arctic to 2020 and Beyond”, and was also declared explicitly in the war doctrine²³. In line with the priorities defined therein, Russian authorities recently made several crucial decisions.

At the end of 2014 the Combined Strategic Command “North” assumed its duties at the naval base of the North Fleet. The decision was made to construct naval bases in this area and establish a special body supervising their activities. Russian interests in the strategic region of the Arctic are to be guarded by the State Commission on Arctic Development Issues, created on 3rd February 2015 and based on President Putin’s decree. Several weeks later, on 14th March 2015 the Russian government passed a resolution confirming the principles of operation and goals of the new body²⁴.

According to this act, the commission is a coordinating executive power organ responsible for increasing and guaranteeing the national security of Russia in the

²³ “Основы государственной политики Российской Федерации в Арктике на период до 2020 года и дальнейшую перспективу”, 18 September 2008, at <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/98.html>, 21 September 2015; “The Russian Security Council met to discuss the protection of Russia’s national interests in the Arctic”, 17 September 2008, at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/1433>, 21 September 2015.

²⁴ “О Государственной комиссии по вопросам развития Арктики”, 23 March 2015, at <http://government.ru/docs/17319/>, 21 September 2015; P. Bajor, “Arktyczne napięcie”, *New Eastern Europe*, at <http://www.new.org.pl/2101,post.html>, 21 September 2015; И. Сафронов, Н. Городецкая, С. Горяшко, “Северный завхоз. Дмитрий Рогозин возглавит комиссию по управлению Арктикой”, 6 February 2015, at <http://kommersant.ru/Doc/2661252>, 21 September 2015. See also: Н. Городецкая, К. Мельников, И. Сафронов, “Арктику возьмут на комиссию. Для управления ею создадут специальную структуру”, 24 November 2014, at <http://kommersant.ru/doc/2617802>, 21 September 2015.

Arctic zone. Its main tasks include: the protection of national interests in the Arctic, improving the administration of the area, and resolving key problems of a strategic character. Within its competences the commission will also coordinate the exploitation of natural resources and strengthen Russia's military presence in this territory²⁵.

Moreover, the document declares that the commission will act based on approved annual plans and its chairman is to be nominated by the President. The present nominee is Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin. The commission may appoint 'task teams', and its sessions are to be summoned whenever deemed necessary, but at least once every six months. The commission's decisions are binding and must be implemented by every organ of federal executive power; however, their enforcement is conditioned by a special legal act issued by the Russian President or the government²⁶.

Conclusions

Based on the above analysis we may conclude that the Ukrainian conflict resulted in changes in the geopolitical situation in Central and Eastern Europe and lowered the overall level of international security. One of the reasons for this is a radical deterioration in relations between Russia and the Western states and in particular with the United States of America. The West is considered a source of threat and danger. Russian authorities consequently continue to portray the West as an enemy who tries to weaken the Russian state and destabilize it internally; to do this they would employ special forces, which are suspected of infiltrating the non-governmental organizations with the aim of launching a coup d'état and overthrowing the legal Kremlin government. The rhetoric of the Russian authorities indicates NATO as one of its main adversaries. The armed forces of the West are said to draw closer to Russia, all while strengthening their military potential, thus constituting a direct threat.

In summary, one may state that the events of 2014 initiated the worst crisis in the relations of the West with Russia since the times of the Cold War. It is unlikely that this situation will be overcome in the foreseeable future.

²⁵ "Постановление от 14 марта 2015 г. № 228 Об утверждении Положения о Государственной комиссии по вопросам развития Арктики", 23 March 2015, at <http://government.ru/docs/17319/>, 21 September 2015.

²⁶ Ibid.; И. Сафронов, С. Горяшко, "Инстанция по всем торосам", at <http://kommersant.ru/doc/2688114>, 21 September 2015.

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Abstract

The article presents the analysis of the circumstances and the doctrinal assumptions behind Russian security policy since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The evolution of the security concept and Russia's perception of its own role and significance on the international arena is discussed here. The changes occurring in the Russian security policy since President Putin came to power are also analysed. The text discusses also the newest concepts concerning security adopted in the War Doctrine with the threats for the Russian state coming from the West and presented in that document.

Keywords: Russia, security, army, war doctrine